



MASTER'S RECITAL

Warner Concert Hall Sunday, April 23, 2006 8:00 P.M. Concert No. 320

La voix humaine

Music by Francis Poulenc (1899–1963)

Text by Jean Cocteau (1889–1963)

Megan Hart, *soprano*

Victoria Vaughan, *stage director*

Philip Highfill, *piano*

Colin Levin and John Orduña, *supernumeraries*

Francis Poulenc collaborated for five decades with librettist Jean Cocteau, and both worked extensively with other members of *Les Six* on operas, plays, ballets and various performance pieces. They also worked with and were heavily influenced by Stravinsky; Cocteau wrote the original text to *Oedipus Rex* (1927) and was designer and director for its 1952 revival. It was shortly after that *La Voix Humaine* came to fruition. Cocteau's play dated as far back as 1929, but Poulenc's 1959 post-war interpretation successfully captured everything that the librettist had originally intended. One suspects that the composer's increasing manic depression and a turbulent love-life had a huge impact on the composition, and the casting of Denise Duval for its premiere performance at the Opéra-comique was no surprise, for she had also experienced recent crisis in her personal life. The story of 'Elle' is a disturbing tale of the final few hours in the life of a young Parisian woman who has just been jilted by her long-time lover. Facing a future without him, she contemplates life ... and death.

*Please refrain from the use of video cameras unless prior arrangements have been made with the performer. The use of flash cameras is prohibited.
Please turn off all cell phones, pagers and watch alarms. Thank you.*

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Elle shares her phone line with the neighboring apartment. Madame next door is trying to call the doctor and refuses to hang up, but Elle is desperately awaiting a call. Finally the operator connects the call and Elle tells her ex-lover of an evening out with Martha. She admits to him that she took a sleeping pill ... just one ... and tells him that she is doing fine and trying to be courageous after he walked out on her.

He mentions a bag of their letters that he would like to collect. She is taken aback but thanks him for being so kind and considerate about her recent foolish behavior. They are interrupted by the arrival of the movers, who are helping Elle with her furniture. As they go about their work, she continues to blame herself for the reckless attitude. She recalls happier times; trips to Versailles, their first phone call ('on a Tuesday ... you know full well that I know these dates by heart') but her lover's further request for the delivery of his belongings begins to wear at her polite façade. When he requests that he have the bag the very next day, she tells him that Joseph the butler can come and collect it, and we begin to watch her disguise the real plans for her future.

The line gets interrupted again, but once they are reconnected she ironically comments on how the line is buzzing and that it doesn't even sound as if he is in his own home. She asks him what he is wearing and returns into her own imagination, but when the tables are turned and he starts talking about *her* appearance, she recoils and admits that she now tries not to look at herself; picturing an old wrinkly woman. The movers return.

The phone is cut off, so the operator calls her to ask about the disconnection, but Elle simply requests that she reinstate the call and gives the operator his number. The line is busy. When Joseph finally answers and says that Monsieur is not home, Elle realizes that he had indeed called her from someone else's apartment, and her imagination begins to run in circles. She regains her composure as she says goodbye to Joseph.

The movers return again as her lover calls back after the disconnection, but by now Elle senses that he is with another woman, and her courage begins to fail her. She starts to consider an empty life ahead of her and promises that she has never (nor will she ever) lie to him. She then admits that she had lied to him about the dress, but continues with a fabricated tale of her evening with Martha. Confessing that she had taken more sleeping tablets than she should have done in an attempt to 'sleep forever,' she disguises her real intentions for the coming night as she tells of the doctor's visit after her overdose. Light-headed with dreams of her lover, she realizes that she is emotionally stronger than she had imagined and is resolved to end her own life with an even larger dose of sleeping pills.

As she begins to feel the effects of the sleeping tablets, she recalls her lover's voice as it sounds in life, as opposed to over the phone. The movers return once more, but she doesn't notice them because she is distracted by the music at the other end of the line. Hiding the fact that she suspects where he is, she comments on how rude his neighbors must be to play loud music so late at night. There is an awkward silence.

Hunched over, she starts to examine the phone cord and how it is now the last remaining link between them. She reminisces on the five years they spent together and claims that it

was he who gave her the strength to live. That the first night is easy, but the second, third, day after day ... the daily chores ... waking, eating ... getting up, going out ... alone. The conversation turns to the dog, who has not eaten since Monsieur left. He won't let her touch him, and she says that he demonstrates the same loss that she herself feels; that he loved Monsieur and cannot understand why he has left.

The phone is interrupted by Elle's inquisitive neighbor once again, and the movers return for more furniture. Once the phone line is hers again, she begins a hallucinatory account of their affair which plunges her once again to thoughts of suicide. Not quite strong enough to accuse him of being with another woman, she hints that if he had lied to her about being at home when he was not, she would forgive him.

More disturbed each moment, Elle is frantic when the phone is disconnected again, but his call to reassure her serves to calm her unfocussed babbling. The movers take the last remaining pieces of furniture to their van, and Elle realizes that she is now truly alone in the world. She hallucinates that with the cable wrapped around her neck she will be closer to him than ever, and then the phone company could never cut them off.

Realizing that she is now totally deranged, he breaks the news that he is leaving for Marseille. She asks that he not stay at 'their' hotel, so that she doesn't have wild imaginings at the thought of his infidelity to her. As she says her final farewell, she tells him that she is being brave and asks that he be the one to hang up the phone first.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

A native of Oregon, **Megan Hart** is currently earning her Master's degree in Opera Theater at Oberlin Conservatory, where she studied for four years with Richard Miller until his recent retirement. She now studies with Lorraine Manz. Oberlin performances include Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* (2006), Blanche in *Les dialogues des Carmélites* (2005), The Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro* (2005), Venus in *Orpheus in the Underworld* (2004), Lady Billows in *Albert Herring* (2004), and The Witch and The Mother in *Hänsel und Gretel* (2003). Last summer (2005), she was a Gerdine Young Artist with Opera Theatre St. Louis and covered the role of Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*. That summer she was also a Young Artist at Opera North and sang Gianetta in *The Gondoliers* and The Bat in *L'enfant et les Sortilèges*. This summer she will be performing the roles of Amina in *La Sonnambula* (Oberlin in Italy), and Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* (BASOTTI). She will be continuing her post-graduate studies at Manhattan School of Music in the fall.

Pianist/conductor **Philip Highfill** is a native of Maryland. Winner of the Chopin Young Pianists Competition at age 16, Mr. Highfill attended the Juilliard School, Yale College, and the University of Illinois, studying piano with Ylva Novik, Theodore Lettvin, Irwin Freundlich, and Donald Currier, accompanying with John Wustman, and conducting with Gustav Meier. His interest in the art song repertoire took him to Vienna as a Fulbright Scholar, and he was active in the Austrian capital for a number of years as a concert accompanist, performing throughout Europe and the United States with many renowned singers, including Cesare Siepi, Plácido Domingo, Wolfgang Holzmair, William Stone, Eric Mills, Rita Streich, Delores Ziegler, and Mary Ann Hart. As a coach at the San Francisco Opera, Mr. Highfill prepared productions starring Leontyne Price, Luciano Pavarotti, Kiri te Kanawa, Montserrat Caballé, Teresa Berganza, James King, Simon

Estes, and Ingvar Wixell. He has taught at the Tanglewood Music Center and Vienna's Hochschule für Musik; conducted for the University of Tennessee Opera, Washington Summer Opera Theatre, and Panamanian National Concert Association; and received research grants from the Joyce Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the H. H. Powers Fund. Since 1987 he has taught at Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where he is Professor of Accompanying, directs the Oberlin College Community Strings which he founded in 1995, and has guest conducted the Oberlin College Choir, Oberlin Choristers, Oberlin Opera Ensemble, Finney Ensemble, and Black River Singers. When not making music or teaching, Mr. Highfill likes to get outdoors, and has trekked, backpacked and climbed in the Andes, the Himalayas, the high Arctic islands, and throughout the American West. He is married to soprano Rochelle Travis.

Victoria Vaughan studied stage directing with Vince Liotta at Indiana University before joining the Oberlin Opera Theater Department in 2000. Her directing credits at Oberlin include *Così fan tutte*, *Le Pouvoir de L'Amour*, *L'Heure espagnole*, *La Cambiale di Matrimonio*, *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and *The Rape of Lucretia*. Production credits at Oberlin include *Dido & Aeneas* at the Teatro Colón, Buenos Aires. In addition to freelance work with Indianapolis Opera and Cleveland Opera, she was Young Artist Coordinator and Assistant Director for Opera North from 2001-2003. Vaughan holds an honors degree in Conducting from the University of Surrey and a Ph.D. in Performance Analysis from the University of Southampton, England. She has taught at the University of Southampton and King Alfred's College; Winchester, and served as Music Analysis Pedagogy consultant for the UK Government's *Performance Teacher's Development Project* for the Department of Education. Vaughan is a founding member and contributor for the European *Gender, Theory, Analysis* symposiums and a regular contributor to CHOICE. She has published in *Music Analysis*, the *British Journal of Music Education*, *Notes*, and presented at the international *Music Psychology and Education* conference. Vaughan is currently Director of Productions for Real Time Opera, premiering Adam Silverman's *Korczak's Orphans* (2003) and John Trubee's *Hawaiian Tan Ratface* (2004). Her acclaimed production of *Feynman* composed by Jack Vees and performed by SO Percussion last summer led to its New York premiere at the Knitting Factory in December 2005 and a New England tour in February 2006. Forthcoming engagements with RTO include *A House in Bali* by Evan Ziporyn in 2008, to be performed in New York City, San Francisco, and Bali.

Thanks to the Oberlin Opera Theater, Ms. Lorraine Manz and the Oberlin Voice Faculty, Jen Groseth and the Department of Theater and Dance, Concert Production staff.